

**United Nations Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women
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Potentials of Community-Based Approaches**

Background

Serbia is primarily a country of destination for particularly women and girls being trafficked from Moldova. However, the number of trafficked persons originating from Serbia is rising as well. Both countries, Serbia and Moldova, lack a comprehensive integrated prevention programme that would address trafficking in human beings on the community level. The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) started to bridge this gap by raising awareness in local communities and by strengthening their skills to discuss trafficking and related issues in the open.

Christian Children's Fund's Anti-Trafficking Approach

Within Christian Children's Fund's child and youth anti-trafficking programmes, the primary objectives are:

- to work in participation with children and young people in order to ensure the protection of their rights, to listen to their opinions and to facilitate a balanced decision-making process on overall welfare and protection;
- to develop an effective network of stakeholders in the community as well as on the national and regional level. Stakeholders include children, parents, families, central and local governments, INGOs, local NGOs, the judiciary and professionals who are responsible for education, health, social welfare and the care of any child;
- to actively influence the development and implementation of policies, procedures and legislation in the field of children's rights and child trafficking;
- to educate those responsible for the welfare of children in protecting the rights of the child;
- to build on and expand CCF's current capacity with regard to the target groups as well as on the national, regional and global levels.

Community-Based Intervention

CCF concentrates on prevention-related projects. In Serbia, as well as in Moldova, there is no comprehensive system to prevent trafficking of children and women. Within the field of prevention CCF concentrates its efforts on young people and gears its activities towards youth living outside bigger towns. The reasons for choosing to work with young people living in semi-rural areas are simple: the majority of anti-trafficking programmes are aimed at protection, assistance, repatriation and to some degree reintegration of victims, while very few programmes concentrate on the prevention of child trafficking. Most prevention projects are performed in big cities and regional centres and focus on general awareness-raising campaigns. Community-based youth anti-trafficking projects need to involve the beneficiaries, who develop their own ideas about what can be effectively done in relation to what is needed most in their own communities. Since community-based projects have proven successful all around the world CCF chose this approach for its youth anti-trafficking projects.

The population in Southern Serbia is divided into three almost equally large ethnic groups: Albanians, Serbians and Roma. The distinct separateness of the closed ethnic groups affects the successful development of the area in a negative way. However, the traditional patriarchal and closed family structure found in this region is well suited for community-based and peer-to-peer approaches. The project was seen as an opportunity to initiate a joint community-based response to an existing problem as well as to train local youth on how to put their ideas into action. Based on the fact that people in general feel a stronger motivation and higher responsibility for action when implementing

their own ideas than when an ‘outsider’ tells them what to do CCF inspired youth to develop and implement their own projects.

In patriarchal societies, young people often feel particularly helpless and find it difficult to approach their elders with questions about sensitive issues. Hence, CCF decided to provide relevant up-to-date information on frequently asked questions for trained young peer educators. This enabled a smooth dialogue and the certainty that suggested topics and activities were linked to the interest of the target group. CCF counted on the enthusiasm, willingness and energy of young people to bring changes to the current situation, also emphasising the fact that uninformed young people are the most vulnerable and prone to manipulation from traffickers.

The positive response triggered a replication of the same approach in Moldova, the country of origin for most of the foreign trafficked victims in Serbia. At the same time the programme aimed at initiating links and cooperation between the youth from Moldova and Serbia, two countries that stand at the opposite ends of the trafficking route. The activities of the programme in both countries were funded by the BMZ through the Sector Project implemented by GTZ.

Training and Implementation of Community-Based Projects

In Serbia as well as in Moldova, CCF worked with individual young activists, youth associations and representatives from various institutions working with children, schools and volunteers. Project partners included the Child Rights Centre and its young lawyers that are trained educators on legal, social theoretical and practical aspects of child trafficking, as well as Beosupport, a youth NGO specialising in peer education and OFER, a Roma youth NGO specialising in Roma education and youth mobilisation. CCF and its partners facilitated an initial training for young people focusing on enabling youth activists to autonomously write, budget, implement and evaluate anti-trafficking projects in cooperation with the local youth in the target communities.

In Southern Serbia youth activists from all three ethnic groups (Albanian, Serbian, Roma) participated in the initial training. Participants in Moldova came also mainly from rural areas. In both countries children and youth at risk, their parents and the wider population benefited indirectly from the measure through the higher level of information. One of the outcomes was an awareness-raising campaign for the prevention of trafficking in children organised by local youth. This initiative also celebrated the Week of Children’s Rights featuring a free theatre show in each municipality of the target areas, drawing sessions on themes related to children’s rights and numerous other workshops and conferences. A major achievement was the initiation of a series of round-table discussions on child trafficking with representatives from local authorities including the police. These sessions were broadcast at the most popular local radio-stations.

Additionally CCF’s project promoted partnerships and direct links between the target communities and raised their interest in further joint prevention of child trafficking projects. Following this, CCF Moldova is extending the project “Peer Education in Preventing Child Trafficking” in another district of Moldova. This follow-up project receives funding from the BMZ through the GTZ implemented programme to improve the socio-economic conditions of women in the Region of Cotesti.

Empowerment Through Engagement

The expected impact of the joint project in Southern Serbia and Moldova included raising awareness about issues related to child trafficking. All youth activists have become disseminators of real facts and information and are keen to do more to inform their local communities about the problem and its consequences. As one participant of the initial training in South Serbia stated:

My eyes are now opened. I know what my rights are and I can fight for them, but I will teach my friends who do not know that they have the same rights like any other man.

Some unexpected positive outcomes include the interest of the local media for all project activities as well as the willingness of local and border police representatives to participate in the local round-table discussions organised by young people. Youth activists also succeeded in awaking public opinion on trafficking in human beings, especially children and youth. Furthermore, the eagerness of

local youth, both in Southern Serbia and in Moldova, to start other joint projects within their communities and jointly in both countries has to be noted and commended.

Highly unexpected was the number of girls that participated especially in Southern Serbia; half of the participants and consequently local project implementers were girls. Traditionally, in these municipalities, girls are not allowed to socialise in public, let alone to travel from one municipality to another for training or project implementation. Sensitive and vigilant lobbying efforts and discussions with their parents and elder members of the families led to initial agreements for girls to participate in the project.

Due to public awareness raising it became obvious how vulnerable communities are to techniques used by child traffickers. This new perspective on trafficking is reflected in the following evaluation after the initial training in Moldova:

I knew approximately what 'the business' meant, but I have found out very concretely during these few days that everyone is at risk.

For decades, the general climate in both countries has been characterised by a strict obedience to the authorities and little or no self-initiative. Even the youth, although growing up in a somewhat different context have not yet developed their self-initiative or self-determination, but rather wait for someone else to make decisions for them. When tackling community problems, the usual pattern is for an outsider to come in, to lecture and to determine what will be done, with the youth as inactive listeners. This CCF project has now encouraged young people to think about what they can do themselves. First results have encouraged them and have given them inspiration to do more and to engage more actively in community development.

Representatives from the local authorities in the three Southern Serbian municipalities participated in the project and have expressed their readiness to take part in future activities. Other NGOs and international organisations (especially in Moldova) have shown interest in either joint projects with CCF or in attracting youth activists from the aforementioned local organisations for their own future projects.

Lessons Learned

The added value to any proposed action is immeasurable when the local communities formulate their own ideas for the project and then are authorised to implement it. The responsibility for the success of one's project produces more commitment, a higher level of responsibility and better local supervision of the activities in the field.

Even though there is a certain level of local awareness about child trafficking, the fear about the possible consequences of breaking taboos and openly discussing this topic prevails in all areas. Therefore the initial catalyst needs to be an external facilitator who opens the discussions and presents the facts.

The selection of participants from rural areas of Southern Serbia and Moldova was strategically well placed; it achieved a higher impact since victims usually come from the rural areas where there is an obvious lack of information and NGO activity. Due to the dire economic situation rural areas lean themselves to being more 'favourable' for 'recruitment' of victims.

A direct personal approach to parents and families made it possible to increase the number of girls participating in community projects, especially in Serbia.

Finally, local community projects attract a high level of interest from the local media.

In Moldova, this was the very first attempt to organise youth NGOs and activists from geographically different places to work together within one project. Initially staff members of CCF were sceptical that it would be possible to get people from geographically diverse areas to work together, but the success of this project has inspired them to try other similar youth and community-based projects.

The ultimate impact of this project has been the enthusiasm and motivation of young people from Moldova and Serbia to work effectively together in order to prevent more children being trafficked from their local communities. However, further training, access to information as well as financial support is required.